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A SYLLABUS FOR A COURSE IN BURMESE ART AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL. INTERIM REPORT.

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PROGRESS MADE IN THE PREPARATION OF AN ILLUSTRATED SYLLABUS ON THE HISTORY OF BURMESE ART IS REPORTED. PREPARATION OF THE SYLLABUS IS A TWO-FOLD TASK REQUIRING THE WRITING OF AN OUTLINE AND THE GATHERING OF SLIDES FOR THE VISUAL PRESENTATION. THE AUTHOR DESCRIBES THE DIFFICULTIES AND SUCCESSES OF GATHERING PUBLISHED MATERIALS AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF DATED ARTIFACTS. DATED SPECIMENS WERE NEEDED TO BUILD A PROVISIONAL FRAMEWORK OF STYLE CHANGES THAT OCCURRED IN CERTAIN TIME PERIODS AND CERTAIN PLACES OF ORIGIN, BUT FEW DATED SPECIMENS COULD BE FOUND. THE GENERAL SCHEME FOR FORMULATION OF THE SYLLABUS WILL BE (1) MAJOR ARTS (ARCHITECTURE, SCULPTURE, PAINTING) AND (2) MINOR ARTS (TEXTILES, LACQUER, POTTERY, HANDICRAFTS). THE SYLLABUS WILL PRESENT THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT WITH FIVE HISTORICAL PERIODS WHICH WILL INCLUDE (1) THE PRE-PAGAN PERIOD, (2) PAGAN PERIOD, (3) INDEPENDENT STATES PERIOD, (4) SECOND EMPIRE PERIOD, AND (5) BRITISH BURMA PERIOD. CAUTION WILL BE APPLIED NOT TO OVERBURDEN THE STUDENT WITH QUANTITY. RATHER, THE SELECTION WILL BE HELD TO A LIMIT BELIEVED TO BE SUFFICIENT FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING AT THE BEGINNING LEVEL. (AL)

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An Interim Report
on
"A Syllabus for a Course in Burmese Art
at the Undergraduate Level"

Project No. 7-E-024
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Jane Terry Bailey

1 June 1967

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Denison University

Granville, Ohio

"An Interim Report on a Syllabus for a Course
in Burmese Art History at the
Undergraduate Level"

Since the main object of this syllabus is to present an orderly visual history of Burmese art one must assemble the contents for this visual presentation. This undertaking is both easy and difficult. An art history syllabus means a written outline illustrated by slides so that the task is two-fold to begin with. Herein lies part of the difficulty.which is to obtain illustrative material of historical value, that is, material which is dated and has a place of origin assigned.

Prior to this project a year was spent, under the auspices of the Great Lakes College Association, studying Burmese art collections abroad and in the United States, and to forming a photographic archives of the same. Before this project began, Denison started forming its own Burmese collection by writing to alumni who had served in Burma and by purchasing items from dealers. We have on hand some 280 specimens of Burmese art - major sculptures, minor sculptures, in bronze, wood, dry lacquer, alabaster, marble; pieces of old and new style lacquerware, silver hollow ware and tribal jewelry and textiles. Very few of all of these have a truly known date or provenance. Most of them have been photographed in print and slide form to be part of our photographic archives.

Our photographic archives of Burmese art is the most extensive in the United States. We have in print form and also slide form, for the major part, 1500 photographs of Burmese artifacts. Many of these were ordered from the owning museums and many were taken last year abroad in Europe. The purpose of going to Europe to visit the extensive Burmese collections there in England, Germany and Switzerland was to gather data to be able to date Denison's collection. Only one museum out of the seven in Europe had any dates given to Burmese art at all; the two U. S. collections, interesting as they are (in addition to Denison's) had none. Curators throw up their hands and say, "You tell me!"

There was another avenue suggested, that the question could be solved by writing to the photographic archives, as listed by UNESCO, in Rangoon. Two letters were written to Rangoon, requesting help on dating art objects and the response was zero. Foreign friends on the staffs of English and German museums also have written to Rangoon on my behalf, really, and the response has likewise been nil. Apparently no mail leaves Rangoon for western scholars.

Therefore the only recourse left was to glean material from publications, shooting photographs that exist in books on S.E. Asian art, Indian art and from archaeological reports and scholarly journals. The idea of this search is to hunt down dated specimens to build a provisional framework of style changes in certain dating periods and certain places

of origin. Hopefully then, our own archives and collection will be truly useable. This is no easy task and involves long hours and much photographic work.

The library at Denison is not really a research library in S. E. Asian art, a condition which necessitates much work on the part of the staff in Interlibrary Loans and the ordering of photoduplications either by Xerox or microfilm. An inquiry has also been made of the company in Zug, Switzerland which publishes microfiches about its Burmese numbers.

We purchased from the library at N.Y.U. a copy of their microfilm on the "Journal of the Burma Research Society", 1911-1938, 1939-1941, 1948, 1950-1958. This long series of journals has already been surveyed and a listing made of the articles pertaining to archaeology containing plates of artifacts which are dated. The plan is to photograph from microfilm using a close-up lens and Kodachrome Type IIA slide film with tripod and a 35mm. single lensed reflex camera. If one has the advantage of a new type back-mirror microfilm reader, one has a direct image on the reader almost like a television screen and it is a simple process but laborious, to photograph from the microfilm reader. This has been tried and it works. One can also use Ectachrome B film. This project director has the unassailable blessing of having unlimited access to a new microfilm reader and permission to use it all day long every day until the job is done. This permission was given by the director of our Zanesville branch of Ohio University which has the reader but no microfilms.

Ordered last December from the Library of Congress were microfilms of the "Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Reports", including the years 1927-1937 when the annual Burmese reports were part of the Indian reports and "Le Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise de l'Extreme-Orient", the leading French journal on S. E. Asian art and containing many articles on Burma. The same photographic process as explained above will be done in this instance, amassing slides of dated artifacts.

A trip to Chicago was made this April to visit the South East Asian library of the University of Chicago to obtain help with bibliography from Miss Maureen Patterson. She was of great assistance, looking up their Burmese material. In the library they have, "Reports of the Superintendent, Archaeological Survey, Burma" for the years 1911-1923, 1924-1926, and these have been requested on Interlibrary Loan. It is hoped that more dated specimens can be obtained from this source.

Of the greatest help was the Annual Bibliography of Indian Archaeology, Kern Institute, Leyden from 1926 on. A long list of articles was copied, many from journals heretofore unknown. It is the library's policy not to circulate journals so there was no choice except to order a Xeroxed list of articles from, "The Modern Review", "The Indian Historical Quarterly", "The Indian Antiquary", "Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art",

"The Journal of the Greater Indian Society", "The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society", "Bulletin de la Societe des Etudes Indochinoises", "Etudes Asiatiques, Revue de la Societe Suisse", "Marg" magazine. Of course one cannot take photographs from Xeroxed material but it is hoped that the text and the illustrations of these recent articles will help to place time elements and clarify the great debt owed to Indian art in relation to Burmese art. We have also received the Artibus Asiae's recent two volumes, "Essays Offered to G. H. Luce", 1966.

In addition to bibliographical research and photographical procedures, a general scheme for planning the syllabus has been formulated. The first big division will be: Major Arts (architecture, sculpture, painting) and Minor Arts (textiles, lacquer, pottery and handicrafts). It works out that these two divisions follow the two major ancestors of Burmese art - India for the former and China for the latter.

One has first, I think, to present to the beginning undergraduate student, a brief background of Indian Buddhist art as it existed in Eastern Indian from the coastal areas whence Indian colonists sailed and settled in Burma. The Indian cities of Amaravati, Nagapattinam and Nagarjunakonda are the earliest art contacts. Later on the ancestor site shifts to Bihar, particularly the Pala and Sena eras.

After setting forth the Indian background one can then proceed to Burma proper, relating the emigration on first the Mons and Pyus from their northern homeland down to Lower Burma and follow this early part with the coming of the Burmans. This rather large block of time will be called the "Pre-Pagan Period", (2nd century A.D. - 1044 A.D.)

The second period will be the Pagan period (1044-1320 A.D.), the third will be the period of the Independent States (1320-1753), the fourth will be the period of the Second Empire under the Konbaungset Kings (1753-1962), the fifth will be British Burma (1862-1937).

Minor arts cannot be treated in so detailed and chronological a fashion because we don't have enough examples "in person" and in photographs prior to the twentieth century. The Victoria & Albert Museum exhibits golden handicrafts dating from the 15th century and some royal court robes of the 18th century but the majority of the examples of minor arts dates from the late 19th and 20th centuries.

China appears to be the main spring or inspiration of the minor arts rather than India. One can study illustrations in Dr. Kwang-Chih Chang's book, The Archaeology of Ancient China and notice remarkable survivals of patterns in Burmese textiles of the tribes from far older civilizations of ancient south China. The same survivals can be noted in small metal sculptures from this same region when compared with similar items on Burmese siphon caps to be found in the British Museum.

The whole world learned sericulture from China and Burma is no exception. From this transferral grew the art of silk weaving. The well-known "luntaya", or "hundred spool" design can be found in Neolithic pottery of South China so that even designs as well as the art came down in part from the Yangtze basin.

Denison has in its own textile collection samples to bear out these findings as well as corrobroative evidence from other museums in its photographic archives.

One cannot fail to mention ceramics in Burma although the Burmese never developed ceramics to as high a plane as other arts. Whether or not they followed Chinese glazing techniques directly is not so easily ascertained. We do have pieces of tableware in a glaze of dark green (lead) and we do have green glazes, white matte glazes, brown glazes and at least a combination of white, green and red glazes, all used for religious Jataka plaques or Kinara figures and votive plaques of similar nature. Both the Victoria & Albert and the Pitt-Rivers Museum at Oxford have examples showing these things. The Field Museum in Chicago has table ware both glazed and unglazed, an assortment of cookware and water pots. Denison has prints and slides of all of these. The body is all examples is terracotta. Perhaps the Burmese never located another clay they cared to use; certainly they apparently never located Kaolin clay which would lead them to the art of porcelain. The more usual reason given is that they developed the art of lacquer instead.

The art of lacquer making is thought to have come from South China. Exactly when is a matter of doubt; some say during Han times; some say not until the Thai migrations much later. There is a lac tree in Burma and the raw material's abundant supply was responsible in part to the development of this art into a highly skilled and pleasing one. We have in the library the newly published monograph, Meisterwerke Birmanischer Lackkunst, by Dr. Gernot Prunner of the Hamburg Museum fur Volkerkunde, naming four classes of lacquer ware. We have been able to put our own Denison lacquers into tentative groups even though we have none older than the 19th century.

So, while there are gaps in the chronology of the Minor Arts, they should not be neglected nor left out. The study of them can be extremely rewarding and is even preferred by many. One must be objective and not give to India all of the culture that Burma has. Whatever the sources of their artistic creation, the evidences of their feeling and ability is theirs alone after the fourteenth century and this too must be presented to the student.

For a semester course I have never found it advisable to hold the students responsible for more than ca. 250 slides, to memorize. It will be quite a job to hold down the selection but must be done for effective learning - on the beginning level. Strange names and places are hazards enough, coupled with a Buddhist world which is outside the acquaintance of most American students.

Work will proceed, mainly photography. The Library of Congress just sent its microfilms this last week of May, over a month late in delivery. This has been a hardship but one can only persevere.